

Organisation and Structure

From 1997 to 1999 I was employed as an Assistant Playleader at Stoke Hill Pre-School in Exeter. I went on courses in child development and playleading techniques. I'd previously been on various other courses, the Sesame course in Drama and Movement, a BTEC in Caring. I'd encountered the theories of Freud, Piaget and Erikson before. Erik Erikson theorised that there were eight stages of human development and he represented these stages as a series of struggles in which something positive struggles with something negative:

- Infancy – Basic trust versus mistrust
- Toddler – Autonomy versus shame and doubt
- Preschool-age – Initiative versus guilt
- School-age – Industry versus inferiority
- Adolescence – Identity versus identity confusion
- Young adulthood – Intimacy versus isolation
- Middle age – Generativity versus stagnation
- Older adulthood – Integrity versus despair
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Looking at these stages from a storytelling point of view we can see that the battles are always between the individual and society. The first six stages are straightforward knock down drag-outs in which the individuals must establish a space for their own identity, industry, initiative, autonomy and skills of trust and intimacy against the social group's imposition of rules and hierarchical structures. The super-ego internalises society's ranking and positioning, suggesting that the individual might be "not good enough" or "not working hard enough" or a "sinner". The individual is cast in the role of the guilty, the confused, the sub-standard, the late developer, the fool, the under achiever, the slacker, the doubter and so on.

By the time the individual gets to middle age they, according to Erikson, will have established either a sense of meaningful production of something, some sort of value within society or they will have been beaten down by social pressure and have collapsed into stagnation, just going along with things. Finally they arrive at the end with either an integrity of ideas and principles or an abject collapse into nothingness.

Well. This is a harsh narrative. This is scary news. This is a place to call "time out" and remember our sense of humour.

These theories from people like Erik Erickson, Jean Piaget and Sigmund Freud always seem to forget the sense of humour.

So, we're all in a terrible gigantic epic battle with the dragon of society. We are in Franz Kafka's land of crazy nightmare. Our crime is the serious offence of being a free thinking individual. We are lost in the maze of castle protocols. We wake up one morning transformed into a beetle and on trial for a crime which has never been explained to us. However, as the Beatles sang "Oh that magic feeling..... nowhere to go....."

One of the big quibbles that I have with Erikson is that life isn't binary. Oh sure, a lot of species have two genders but it would be a big mistake to then assume that everything in the world can be understood through dichotomies. What about trichotomies? What about all the other possibilities which don't necessarily divide into two sides? Life isn't a game of football or cricket or baseball. There can often be a third or fourth or fifth element to consider. What if I don't want to either trust or mistrust? What if I prefer to use measured and nuanced levels of pragmatism, logistics and negotiation instead of Naïve trust? What if I don't accept the concept of original sin? What if I can come up with a better way of doing a thing than the conventional wisdom of the socio-*proto-super-ego*? (Ha Ha!).

Structure is important in child development but radical challenges to structure are also important. As a boy I was very religious. I went to Methodist Church Sunday School every week, I said my prayers to Jesus and I read the bible. When I got home from Sunday School my father, who wasn't religious, would chuckle at my religious enthusiasm and pose questions to me to make me think about alternatives. Maybe Adam and Eve weren't real? Maybe Jesus only metaphorically fed the 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes? My mother wasn't religious either. She grew up in Ireland and had bad memories of being beaten with a stick by nuns who ran the school.

So I grew up with a combination of structure and freedom of thought. I wish everyone could have the same combination.

As a boy I did a paper round seven days a week. I got up very early, delivered the papers and then went to school. On Saturdays I had my pocket money plus my earnings from the paper round. I could buy all of the comics and science fiction paperbacks I craved. From the age of 13 to the age of 16 I was in the Air Training Corps. I went to Air Training Corps meetings every week on a Tuesday and a Thursday night and wore a uniform. I polished my boots and blanched my webbing belt. I wore my uniform beret at the correct angle and I marched in step. We formed up in three ranks and spaced the correct distance from each other at an arm's length. We performed "shoulder arms" and "present arms", "stand to attention", "stand at ease" and "stand easy". We marched "by the left in threes" and knew the difference between "right turn" and "right wheel". We could do the gliding of the boot several inches above the ground in a "slow march". We carried Lee Enfield 303 rifles which were old and could not fire a bullet but we learned to clean them with a "pull-through" anyway.

At 16 I discovered the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and resigned from the A.T.C. But my life still had structure. I still got up early and commuted into London for work each day.

Michael Moorcock has written a great many books in which the multiverse is the battleground between three opposing factions: The Gods of Chaos, The Gods of Order and The Gods of The Cosmic Balance.

These ideas got me thinking about the possible forces behind narrative structures. Chaos, Order and Balance are certainly three possible ones. Then what about an opposite to Cosmic Balance? How about The Gods of Cosmic Imbalance? They would be the ones

dedicated to making sure that the balance is always disturbed, but they wouldn't care which direction it went in, just so long as it was out of balance.

Then what about Good versus Evil? Add those two to the four in the previous paragraph and we have six. And then what about quirky eccentric individuals who care nothing for any of the aforementioned Gods? Quirky individuals who only want to do their own thing? So that makes seven types of character and then there's an eighth one who is a confused and bewildered soul who does care but doesn't know what is the right thing to do.

I make it eight character forces which can drive a narrative. They represent Order, Chaos, Balance, Imbalance, Good, Evil, Individuality and Confusion. By far the last two, Individuality and Confusion are the most interesting because they are like ourselves. They are human and have many many variations whereas the other six are cosmic absolutes.

In the centre of reality is an eternal chaos. Outward from this chaos spin the worlds of varying levels of order. At the outermost distance everything freezes in absolute structured stillness. Good and Evil are relative judgements which vary according to which side of it we stand but they both make sense only when they are in the middle zone, between absolute chaos and absolute order. Balance and Imbalance permit change and yet they filter it, channel it, re-direct it. Sentient beings wander throughout the worlds, seeking meaningful goals.

Meaning can only exist when there is meaninglessness, meaninglessness can only exist when there is meaning. That is the emotional structure of reality.